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## The Trinity Review, Fall 1973

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# TRINITY REVIEW



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Cover: Queen Anne's Lace  
 Connie Doyle

# The Paralytic

Always  
when she opened  
the door  
she found him lying  
on the bed,  
fully dressed, unmoving, not asleep.  
He was rigid as a plastic green snake,  
his length stretched out till  
its feet spilled past the mattress.  
They hung unmoving there, suspended  
off the floor.  
All motion centered  
in his eyes, and in that  
lack of motion which requires  
terrible restraint.  
She could not breathe when  
he lay so still; perhaps  
he trapped oxygen in the secret veins  
below his throat.

She would come forward  
slowly  
her feet swathed in silence,  
silently moving she would cross  
the green room.  
Slowly she would gesture  
till his eyes slid in their casements  
and their light  
slowly  
across air  
struck.



# Translation: Tropism V

## by Nathalie Sarrante

On very hot July days the walls across the way threw a hard and brilliant light on the small, damp courtyard.

There was a great void beneath the heat, a silence, everything seemed suspended; you only heard, aggressive, harsh, the grating of a chair dragged along the tiles, the banging of a door. It was in this heat, in this silence - a sudden cold, a tearing.

And she sat motionless on the edge of her bed, taking up the smallest space possible, taut, as if waiting for that something to burst, to crash down on her in this threatening silence.

Sometimes the sharp cry of the cicadas in the petrified prairie beneath the sun and like death, provokes that sensation of cold, of solitude, of abandon in a hostile universe where alarming things are brewing.

Stretched out in the grass under the torrid sun, you sit motionless, you spy, you wait.

She heard in the silence penetrating up to her, along the old streaked blue wallpaper of the corridor, along the dusty paintings, the little noise that was the key in the lock of the front door. She heard the office door close.

She stopped there, always shrivelled up, waiting, doing nothing. The least activity, like going to the bathroom to wash her hands, or running water from the faucet, seemed to be a provocation, a brisk leap into the void, an audacious act. This sudden noise of water in the suspended silence would be like an appeal towards them, like a horrible touch, as if you went to prod a jellyfish with the point of a stick and then waited with disgust until suddenly it jumped, moved and recoiled.

She felt them, exposed, still behind the walls, and ready to jump, to move.

She didn't move. And around her all the house, the street seemed to encourage her, seemed to consider that immobility natural.

It looked certain, when you opened the door and when you saw the stairs, full of relentless calm, impersonal and colorless, stairs that didn't seem to have kept the least trace of the people that had gone through, not the least memory of their passage, when you would get behind the window in the dining room and look at the facades of the houses, the stores, the old women and the small children who walked in the street, it seemed certain that, for the longest time possible — you had to wait, to become motionless, to do nothing, to not move, that the supreme understanding, the real knowledge, was to undertake as little as possible, to do nothing.

At most you might, taking care not to wake anyone, descend without seeing it, the dark dead stairway, and modestly advance along the sidewalks, along the walls, just to take a little air, to give yourself a bit of movement, not knowing where you are going, not wanting to go anywhere, and then return home, sit on the edge of the bed and wait again, recoiled, immobile.





# Sympathy

There are even weathered shingled peaked roofs over the gas pumps in Wharton. We like things neat here, Gulf is admitted, but on our terms. I have never understood why the old houses surrounding the green where they've belonged for centuries sit self-consciously. Perhaps it's the dated placards they're forced to bear, or they've been sighted too often through admiring cameras. Their old families don't live in them anymore — they've fallen to new masters who've restored them authentically, calculatingly, into performances of a past, the houses know, that never quite was. The Congregational church blandly graces the green's north end in wooded uprightness, its reaction an unblinking stare that has glazed the scene for it, I think, for years. A granite pillar, a polished and rechiseled improvement on the glaciers carving, rises from the green's heart. A motto was to have been inscribed but no one could ever agree upon Wharton's crowning words. In the middle of the last century, the devil appeared in town and stamped his footprint into the green's rock spine. One night I slipped off my shoe and fit my foot into the space.

Oh, but you shouldn't listen to me. Wharton is charming, it's practiced charm since its beginning. I am going through a phase of weaning myself away from the place before I leave next year for college. Whartonites are lovely people. They're mad to organize festivals and games and fairs to highlight every season, spotlight local talents, delight ourselves with ourselves.

When Cynthia Trask disappeared it was a matter of habit to organize the search for her. She had disappeared, though not mysteriously. A not very interesting junior high school girl, late for dinner, her bike found jackknifed in the bushes alongside a quiet road, a common enough motif. No one hoped for a moment that anything but the worst had happened.

They called my father to join the search of the woods. My parents included me in the whispered details. They told Jane and Eric, 'Cynthia Trask is a little lost,' and they used my father's haste to dart and yelp after his scattered casual clothes, a lumpy sweater, boots, his old army jacket. In the hearty man-warrior aura that surrounded the Indian wars he set off in the cold dark. My mother watched until the last of his car lights faded. She sighed, Jane started a question. 'Oh hush,' my mother's recent headache snapped. 'She's been kidnapped,' Eric decided, thrilled, 'for a million dollars. Do the Trasks have that much money?' Jane's eyes filled with another possibility. 'Someone's killed her.' Eric wished he'd thought of that. 'You're morbid infants,' I told them. 'We said she got herself lost. That's all.' 'Don't be hard on them Meg.' My mother drew them to her and they grinned at me from under her arms. 'They're only children. Why don't you bake something

for the Trasks?' The three moved as one to the bookcase. My mother would read to them as she hadn't since they learned to read for themselves. 'Thornton Burgess?' Lively woodland tales. 'Not Joe Otter,' Jane remembered. 'You cried,' Eric jeered, 'when he got his toe cut off.' Jane's face arranged for crying again. My mother selected Jimmy Skunk. 'There's nothing wrong with crying. Now quiet,' and they settled at her knees, wanting to be held by the stilling story.

We always gifted the distressed with food, lulling custard for sickness, cold pink ham for death. What would be appropriate for a disappearance — one shortcake, devils food? I wished the house weren't so barely windowed, I hoped the doors were locked, I missed our loud-barked dog crushed by the schoolbus a few months before. Molasses cookies, there could be nothing significant about them, homely companionable cookies. In the yellow bright kitchen, hostile to my mood, I blamed the baking powder can for being so red, the flour for its bleached dustiness, the molasses for its stately old world descent. Cracking the eggs, I enjoyed that. The electric mixer seemed too noisy and too easy. I needed the arm ache from stirring the stiff batter, a sort of badge. The windows were duraglass against Eric's wild pitches and wild birds' dives, Jane could credibly recall our dead dog's bark. We were safe. When I last saw Cynthia, her ears were pink.

'No news?' My mother looked resentfully at the telephone, the intruder with bad news, silent with no news. 'What are the kids doing?' I asked. My mother shrugged. 'Poking around. They're edgy. Jane's seeing fiends at the window and Eric wants to chase them.' 'Gory kids.' I wasn't allowed the observation. 'We live here so you children can have,' she selected the word, 'normal childhoods and I'd rather they weren't exposed to this sort of thing.' She measured the dough with practiced flicks onto flat tins. 'We had the makings for tollhouse,' she said.

When the telephone did ring again it was resourceful ladies at the library arranging coffee and food for the men. I worked there after school and they needed someone who knew where things were kept. 'Someone for the dirty work,' I muttered and my mother said I should be glad I could make a contribution. 'Still,' she frowned, 'I don't like you out tonight.' If anyone comes I'll throw the dictionary at him,' I promised. Words are my weapons.

Eric wanted to come with me. 'To see, to see,' he insisted, fascination twisting on his face, strange and ugly-making, the face I would see all night on the adults, disguised and filtered, but recognizable from the unguiled prototype. 'I don't want to see anything and neither should you.' Meg's being righteous, Eric would have thrown at me if he'd had the vocabulary.

'Drop the cookies off, too, if you will.' My mother had run out to the car and handed me her afterthought. The uncooled cookies, crowded and piled in a heap would be soggy and snapless. I pushed the box away from my leg so I wouldn't feel the warmth of it.

I went through a spell as a kid of slipping outside my window late at night, my secret moon life, having adventures impossible by day with friends who could reform themselves into demons and gashlies. We adored being scared. It was like moving through the pages of a coloring book that had soaked, forgotten, dropped in a muddy watered hole, outlines dark and darker by



arbitrary shiftings of cloud and moon against the general blurring of night gray. We spied through people's windows. The best thing anyone ever saw was George Rollins standing naked in front of his mirror, but I wouldn't look at that. I liked the quiet scenes, unguarded faces of readers, the defenseless settle of television drowzers. My prying was never an exploitation of private moments. I imagined I felt a kind of love for them, through my one-way glimpsing understanding. Porch lights snapped us running onto the road and when cars passed we crumpled into rock shapes or grabbed brush and held it outstretched in either hand pretending to be trees. I thought if I truly believed myself a tree, I would appear one.

Tonight the street was transformed. Violated and fragile, the houses beacons windows defensively bright fearing less benign intruders, astonished out of smugness. A clutch I didn't want to admit played at me.

The Trask's house alone was dark, a single light from the main window, no outside light at all. Self-contained and unsensational. Another car was edging out of the driveway as I turned and I caught offended postures on the passengers in my headlights. My face, if they'd noticed, was set expressionless. A relative imported from somewhere was tending the door. The Trasks were not receiving. Not to gush sympathy, not to peer for snatching glances of figures within. It was important that I stare at nothing and present the box wordlessly. I must have been unnerving, a soft-knocked wraith who might have been apparition except for the confusion of fusing molasses it left. My feet tangled with an abandoned rake on the path. Her ears were pink and she was half turned.

The police station, one-roomed, celless, a joke since the summer before when it was robbed of a bag of marijuana being held for evidence, was too small to hold the crowd of searchers the crowd of cars along the village street had emptied. The church received them, the all-male, ill-dressed assortment straining in pews shot back to school days. I saw a fresh penknife gouge, the starting of initials or a date on a corner pew back the Sunday after. An FBI man from Boston who was used to this sort of thing leaned from the pulpit, instructing, assigning them to search groups, barking at them to be thorough, not to disturb whatever they might find, not to be heroic if they encountered a suspect. A suspect, a collective picture of the intruder formed, shabby black clothed, unwashed, unshaven, uneven-eyed, chinless, long-nosed, broken toothed, unseen but seeing us, unreasonably striking at one of our children. A stranger, if it was a stranger. No one knew of the other FBI man standing at the back of the church with my father, a tight-lipped, trusted selectman, collecting names. That one, how had he come so quickly, that one, who's he, what's that suppressed expression on his face. No, it couldn't be, my father murmured, and then the suspicions infected him as he remembered hints and incidents, quiet clinic visits, whisper boastings of affairs.

The men were gone, improbable democratic groupings of them, when I arrived. I parked on a far side of the green and walked its length, past the houses I'd felt sorry for that were mocking me now, sure with their dated placards, past the church, left to itself again. The dumb monument chided me for my amusement at its inarticulate presence. I walked faster, I ran, I



jumped over the outcropping marked with the footprint, and I fell into the library mothlike, fluttering. The threat of the solicitous ladies restored me. Palely hovering before best-selling covers, their hands were looking for uses.

'You're so brave, dear, to come out,' Mrs. Goodwin touched my arm. 'Did you see anything?' I shook my head. 'Mrs. Allen saw a strange car this afternoon. It gave her a funny feeling,' she said. They had all shared their premonitory shivers, it seemed, and poked at me for mine.

'No, I didn't see anything,' and I turned them to their busywork. The mugs are in that cupboard, you operate the coffee machine this way, yes, you can clear that table of the third grade rock display, they needed to be told.

'Was that you going into the Trasks, Meg?' Mrs. Davis asked. 'Probably.' She was spooning too much coffee into the machine. 'What did you think?' Implications were in her voice. 'I didn't think anything.' She must take her coffee ebony. 'I thought they were rather,' she lowered her voice, 'ungracious. I asked that relative specifically, to see them so I could say how sorry I was personally but I was informed they wouldn't be disturbed.' I screwed the top on the jar before she could dip again. 'Well . . .' I drifted away.

'Did you know the girl?' My age made me their closest tie to Cynthia. What would they want me to remember. I was backed against the window, exposed to anything on the street, framed by the crewel curtains the library friends had made and were fingering limp during proud visits. 'I know her vaguely.' My tense was deliberate. 'Nothing particular.' 'No one knows the family well either. They're so quiet,' someone said. 'It must be hard for them,' Mrs. Goodwin supposed and they all tried to fasten feelings onto the half-known family.

'I wonder what did happen,' was finally proposed and with the smell of the brewing coffee grew the sad night's version of a morning hen session as they speculated.

I refused their coffee, I wasn't hungry for their doughnuts. I didn't want the pseudo-joltings of their escalating theories. 'I saw a shabby car . . . no one heard a shot . . . strangled, that's quiet . . . knife, beaten . . . rape.' 'How awful, do you think so?' 'Mark my words . . . a rape in town . . . my goodness.' They buzzed, they exclaimed, knotting each new thread in the shroud they were making for Cynthia. I was glad I wasn't around during the witch hunts.

I sat on the stool behind the desk, my accustomed place, hands over my ears, studying the overdue list, the villains. Mrs. Thomas detached herself from the flurry, flushed. 'I shan't be able to sleep tonight. Are there any new mysteries, dear?. They censored me with stiff backs for my laugh.

The men, as they straggled in, were greeted as crusaders. Bramble-scratched, shivering and sweating, they moved in the small library long-stepped and loose gestured as if they were still outside. The women charged with questions. Eyewitness flashes. Nothing had been found. A car hidden on a logging road, the roof pounded, yielded kids parking, on a night like this, can you beat that, they asked each other. Mr. Simmons paced. 'I chased a fellow across Oliver's field and it turned out to be David here.' Mr. Emerson called across the room, 'My friend, I thought you were he.'

Impressions and opinions swarmed as voices swelled to carry, greedy to be heard. Party-like except for the costumes, housedresses with sweaters tossed

over them, stained and awkward work clothes. No one needed to be chic, everyone was wearing and baring his outrage. A solidarity of scruffiness, suddenly yanked from the everyday.

'Don't you feel dreadful, Meg? I do.' Mrs. Means shivered at me. 'I know I'll never feel safe again.' Don't you know you adore this, being scared I wanted to tell her.

None of the searchers found her that night in their dark stumblings. Our drama would be incomplete that night. No body. And the Trasks would not be observed. Nobody. Unfulfilled, unplaceable connections bounced from the searchers, from the women, ricocheting, dizzying, multiplying back onto themselves.

I wanted to go home, I wanted it to be yesterday. Did I ever hear anyone say, Poor Cynthia. I hope someone did. Pink-eared, half-turned, she was listening.

She was happened upon early the next morning by a sniffing dog, first, and then his slow paced master, horrified, fainting Mr. Gallagher. The family requested the details be kept private but the policeman leaked them through his drinking cronies. Her head had been crushed by a rock. She'd been raped. Before or after? Before. I wondered what Cynthia had thought of, her last minutes alive.

That next morning, Saturday, the village had a rain washed appearance, perhaps because it had been so cluttered and light spotted the night before, perhaps because I expected it to look chastened. The library was busy but quiet, floating subdued souls, now that we'd had a death. Shaking heads, they leafed through books thoughtfully, deliberately placing the right page upon the left. An underwater scene, until the day's events set them churning.

Had I heard, Mrs. Swett rolled her eyes heavenward, the Trasks had said they'd rather not, they'd refused to allow a scholarship established in their daughter's name. Did I know, a voice demanded, the Trasks told the Garden Club they needn't flower the church for the funeral. The service would be small and private. The Boston paper was slapped onto the desk before me. Look, that brief notice, no mention of our night's drama. I didn't respond as they listed their rebuffs. Unfeeling girl, I heard it whispered.

When I last saw Cynthia, pink eared, half turned, listening, she sat in front of me on the homeward schoolbus as I told a friend how old John Donne used the word die to indicate sexual consumation. Intriguing notion, I'd mused, have an orgasm and die, how violent if you thought about it, and I went on and on. I knew Cynthia was listening, I knew she was blushing, I knew she was fascinated. It was uncharacteristic talk for me, but I'd decided, the kid should know such things.

The Monday after I slid into the front right seat of the bus. The sight of the road ahead was clear, the cool air from the door as it opened for stops relieved the hot body, old lunch pressing smell. I'd closed my eyes. The force shuddered through me, fraining and emptying, a bitter cold core took over, leaden, fixed. I willed my eyes open. The short funeral procession was passing, passing through town, passing through me, and I had thoughtlessly planted myself in Cynthia's accustomed place.



# Two Women

I could stay away for years  
yet when I'm back, it takes no time  
at all for us to be locked into the familiar struggle.  
Your rooms, square as a box,  
have the untraceable smell of loneliness — every object  
in its place and me on the couch, trapped  
by your persistent questionings: "Are you happy,  
are you loved?" I move back into myself,  
an old defense, hiding behind the sullen answers.  
The old tension is back, the slightest off remark  
can cause a ripple in the atmosphere.  
I feel you watching me, trying to extract  
some notion of vindictiveness from my silence.  
You probe again: "why aren't you happy?"  
"Why must you live like that?"  
I swear sometimes it is very hard  
to love you and somehow absolutely necessary.  
To make it easy on myself  
I put you back into a setting I can admire:  
your loveliness, the stories of your difficult  
but adventurous life. I see you gathering wood  
in the countryside. Your eyes smart  
from the cold; your fingers are red and stiff.  
Now and then you blow on them to keep warm.  
It is very hard to live in Poland then,  
but you have already escaped; the border  
guards are bribed, the smuggler paid.  
Later, on your wedding day, you are an unshy bride.  
There is such fire in your eyes, you have defied two families.  
They're at your feet, squatting  
for the camera. The lillies lie unmoving in your arms.  
Another picture still. You're running in the street.  
It is early, the houses are still dark. The wind  
whips your coat open, tries to make you swallow  
your long hair. I was in your arms then, wet and frightened.

This is how I like you best then, removed,  
romanticized, a fiction  
of the past and not your ordered life.  
You, on the other hand, remember the child who clung  
to you, aping your gestures, wanting to wear  
your clothes, begging to be taken everywhere.  
Now when I'm here, you want that little girl again,  
and I am tempted to go back for love but can't.  
How can I tell you what all these years  
have meant to me? The fragile victories,  
the candid mirrors found at last . . .

You probe and nag, I snap, we fight  
like two intruders in each other's territory  
then are ashamed, make up and end up  
eating from each other's hand.  
And when I leave, it's like the first break  
all over again. You cry and I feel guilty.  
You pack my bags with food. I promise  
to telephone as soon as I am safely home.  
When I call, your voice  
coming across such distances  
stirs up vague memories  
of something lost that must be lost again.

## Narcissa

The night is faultless.  
Black heart, this slow coasting into sleep.  
Deep blood surrounds the liquid of the bed.  
A pearl buds under my fingers,  
Rosy drop lifting from polished skin.  
A menace is cracking old stars in conical teeth,  
Wrenching, wrenching a torment  
Into me. I'm the woman I want to be,  
The prophetess, the seeress  
Married to visions,  
Fanatically loved by warrior kings.





# The Light Kiss

Still when I visit you  
you lean near with your goodnights  
and your scented kisses rolled in your hand,  
rustling through the dark air  
to find me, raised sleepless  
among the looming wood and china,  
planting your lips and your motherhood's regret  
on my cracked forehead  
as the silk-winged moth burns  
at the aching bulb.

What have we done in the world  
to be so cold together:  
unanswered letters  
asking for respect, a  
little consideration,  
all the black stone tears that fell.  
Lip to lip we have known each other:  
the light kiss falling accurately  
under the wide, pressing eye.

You taught me how to bear myself  
in silence,  
how little it takes  
to restore composure —  
over and over  
we have photographed each other  
in every graceless position,  
and I have recorded  
these bare walls  
but still cannot repeat them.

Well, now there's something in me  
I would like to show you:  
I am the hunched rib I was born to be,  
I am. The pain  
it has given you  
requires too much to bear between us:  
my hands glance nervously about  
in the light. The stammering confusion  
revealed in our same, two faces,  
worlds apart.

If even sounds mean  
opening an unwanted door  
to our inside,  
then free me  
from the naming force  
of human speech. The imprecision,  
the killing love it breeds.  
I write,  
I am the hunched rib I was born to be,  
but even these oppressed words  
would not make it on the thin wire of language  
that burns in your curled, white ear.

# Seacaught Widow's Walk

Oily red meat tuna lie harpooned-holed on the Maine dock this summer. I breathe their fat when I wake in the morning and walk in their gored guts, residues of night's flaying, greased into the wood, as I travel like a displaced prisoner from my parent's summer home to the beach. The mornings are warmer than before, the air tightened by the migratory flock of city flight seekers moving in drones over the pebble and glass beaches to the water. Their bodies hunch over sparse pockets of sand, the guise of a New England Coney Island, their dregs of soot-stained flesh are left in plastic wrap and beer cans. The Hillanders, those who live off-shore, in the belly of the mother, sucking parasites of chain stores and high rise living, gather their over-priced souvenirs and flee to the city gasping of the memories of deep-fried clams and forty-cent cigarettes.

This summer is warmer. Calmer. I can take the dinghy out, alone, to the islands casting the fishing rod once in a while into a school of blues. The waves are gentle. The storms passive. Sharks have come as far as Scarborough.

I do not know sharks except from sport magazines and a childhood trip to an aquarium. The fishermen say that if you spot one while you are in the water, to move like a fish or hit the beast on the nose. He calls me over to him and warns me. I ignore him and standing at the edge of the dock I rearrange the bottoms of my bathing suit pulling the elastic tight over my buttocks and dive between fish heads and fish scales and empty beer cans.

Burrowed in the berth of the water like a prenatal child, I feed on his image. The hip boots strapped to his waist, the light brown beard scratched into a chiseled face, the fish-smelling body and thick forearms caught in a lumper's dream of mackerel heaped on mackerel. His laughter echoes into the water following me like air bubbles floating on top. I surface and then dive back into the womb catching a glimpse of his shoulders angling the shovels full of fish into the rope bins, lumping the massive fish dream. The water has been browned and discolored by motor fuel and red tuna guts. I swim into the confusion of moorings.

Summer is the siren of the year, calling, beckoning, alluring the pace of the winter months. I lie still and silent in the cocoon of city snow, posters of islands plastered on my walls like dreams, as the lovers of winter hibernate in my warmth, burrowing their hairy bodies between my legs, scraping my emotions to chisel a warped devotion. In winter I am dead like the naked trees bowing to the cold and desolation of winter. Dead like frozen water where a life exists but can not be seen. In winter I become a layer of ice, stepped on, beaten till I sink under the water and melt alone oozing to my



birth. One winter love bleeds me of that still death, turning the corpse in his hands to break the charred bones. He moves his hands along the sides of my face down to my shoulders in vain creating the gentility of a placid woman. He senses an erection and calls it his. He quickly undresses us, casting the discarded clothes onto a cold heater. His heaving is the chill of winter, a dead sensation that crawls like lice up my backbone teasing the hairs. The clawing becomes sharp icicles, prickling the tips of my fingers, freezing my emotions and locking them into a prison of winter nightmares that breed in the black city snow. His semen pours like sap onto my stomach itching, scratching like wool on a nude body. Outside cars dressed for winter scream past my window, their screeching on icy roads flogging my dried body. This lover bends over me, his face frozen in the air above me, his lips pursed and stuck. I look away into the white of the pillow pulling the blankets over me so that he can not see my body shivering. I look into the bleached fibers imagining grains of light. In desperation I disappear into the fantasy of my mysterious islands leaving the winter love to hang on starkly nude branches.

I walk down to the dock at sunset this evening to see three nine-hundred-pound tuna basking in the electric daylight. My foot moves down their oily sides, across what seem pregnant bellies and then to their decapitated heads, eyes bulging, jaws with no throats. He stands beside me his hands in his pockets, a shirt cast over his back to keep the mosquitoes away as they prey on the red meat. His voice is thick. Drawn like the smoke that comes from his mouth and circles in the air. The fish lies at our feet. He hoses her down and cleans her off making her ready for packing. I wait by the edge of the dock watching him pull the fish onto the conveyor belt and into the truck. He turns and smiles. I watch each boat unload her catch. I see the fat old fisherman count the tons of mackerel and slip the captain his receipt in a recently emptied beer can. I see this man lift a tuna onto the scale and listen to his roar. His voice curdles into the cool night air. The retarded grandmother swinging on her tree swing at the top of the hill turns and waves. The man smiles and throws a mackerel in her direction.

Each boat parades in front of the old wood dock unloading her mackerel and blues into the lumper's hole. The fishermen gather on the deck bow hugging the wood sail beams, nudged masts, and stare up at me. I have metamorphosed into another fish to catch. Their eyes, sun bleached, cast the rod in my direction hooking onto a piece of material pulling it up over my head and exposing for their fantasy delight my breasts. My lumper puts his fish smelling arm around my shoulders and weighs me in as his prize. The fishermen, fish-mouthed, drown in the beers as they clean their rods preparing for the next day's sail.

The ocean knocks at the dock's pilings, rubbing away at the gnarled wood leaving a green slime at the base visible at the water's surface. My lumper climbs down into the hole disappearing except for an arm that jumps up to push the fish bin onto the dock. Maine summer night wind blows my hair into my face and the fat old fisherman, a hat tossed to the back of his grey sweaty head, throws me a rubber band leftover from a sack of mackerel.

My lumper and I kiss on the steps of the Presbyterian Church. His fish smell seeps into my clothes and dances in my hair. I am the lumper's dream

of the night. I am the dream that combines the breaking of water over the rocks, the chill in the night air, the splinter of moon hidden in the clouds, the oscillation of stars, and a day's catch loaded onto a refrigerated truck moving down the coast. His fingers, calloused and thick, pass along the lines of my lips, down my chin to my throat and over my breasts. He smooths me as he would touch one of the giant tuna. His chin rests on my shoulder and we watch the painted night bleed into day. By the church are a few houses. White framed, white shudder, clothes-lines strung from tree to tree. From the church steps we can see the shallow woods and the beginning of the bedded shore rocks. Flat rocks, expose their heads, a sea of flat heads heading toward the ocean. My parent's summer home reclines behind us smelling of garlic soaked fish and classical music and washing machines caked in sea sand. We watch the night being cut into slices of dark raw flesh by stars and tree branches and rooftops. My lumper whispers that the sky and the sea are the same, that they both can bury you, that each star is a sailor drowned and each constellation is the image of the fish that he was after. My lumper feeds at my breast groping at my dress between my legs feeling the crumpled flesh hidden under the nylon.

I hide from the day on the widow's walk, the lover's watch waiting in the thick beams and decayed floorboards for him. The ocean curls like a mother's hand around the face of the beach rocks, a gauze of affection smoothed over the surface. Fishing boats and sailboats play war in the distance wrestling against the calm water, tossing nets into the pools of fish and raising sails that billow against a lenient wind. The bathers nestle between rocks building castles out of broken glass, driftwood, and emptied weather-worn sea shells. I sit in a rocker, a mattress and blanket behind me rocking in time to the movement of rats and mice warning me like a fog horn of my intrusion. I rock forward as the waves rush against the shore, their passion stretching over the rocks. I rock backwards when the waves retreat as the lover who has shown too many of his emotions and flees leaving broken pieces over my body that bite into my flesh.

His fish hand swims under my skirt and down my back diving for my food, a seagull, dropping me in mid-air and watching in delight as I swoon towards the ground. He cups my breasts and rocks me faster and faster till the sound of the wood beating against the old floorboards obliterates the rush of the ocean. Lurching seagulls sail past the window crying. My hair flies behind me sweeping against his face carrying with it the fume of rotted fish heads, fish scales, and red tuna guts. His smile is smeared across my face, my laughter screams through the lover's walk, our passion rattling the ancient wood and semen smoldering between cracks in the floorboards. The afternoon sun nestles behind a wind struck sail. My lumper runs his hand along the sides of my body pressing and pushing the flesh, twisting and gnarling the pubic hairs. He hides his flaccid penis between his thighs. We watch the late afternoon sun hide behind the white-haired clouds and the boats clipped and nudged of their sails turn bashfully towards the harbour. The sea covers us like crisp white sheets. My hands feel the thick chest, the hairless skin, following as the navigator the course from his hips to his buttocks. His skin moves from rough to smooth. He watches me study him as he watched the



flaying of the giant red tuna, half delight, half repulsion. His mouth opens like a fish mouth sucking in the air.

My lumper sings of fishermen and big game fish slurring the names of the sailors against my belly, his saliva dripping from his mouth as the words pour from between his lips. His hands are under my buttocks. His eyes rise above my breasts. This man is a sea tale. I unravel his fantasy, untwining the gauze of thread strung like a web around him. A naked tree dances in the half-light. One side is a dense blue black, the other a silver white. The branches are the sinewy hands of an old man's. My lumper, my lover, rises, his head shaded by the canopy of branches through the widow's walk window. He turns so that I can not see him and dresses pulling each particle of clothing from the rocker. He lays my dress on top of me sliding his foot down my leg.

I am the widow of the widow's walk waiting for my sea lover to return. As I walk down to the sea my feet rot in the dirt. They begin to stink of decaying fish as I pass a couple having dinner, they scream of red tuna blood to the lovers walking past the dock. Each step takes me deeper into a nowhere, a somewhere scrambled in Maine woods and sea. Pine-needles and sharks. Wood docks painted by tuna guts. My lumper lumps his mackerel deep into the night casting my imaginary image, smiles caught in the meshing of the fish bins. I have left, leaving islands and fish scales and mothers of flayed tunas.

A Maine morning sun reminds me of the oily red tuna guts. My sails billow against a lenient wind as I am tossed from the berth of the water to the prison of a winter's widow's walk memory. As I leave my lumper is lumping mackerel into netted fish bins watching in the cool night air for my return. His foot slides down the bodies of the giant tuna for me.

# To Travis

to travis and the sun (if nothing  
more were true than you)

the man with the  
rifle above the branch  
library (its roof)  
offers hello his  
gun glistens i  
head on in to the  
A&P store the aisle  
clears itself of  
you the shelves  
riddled tin  
holes/in)  
do no less  
brussel sprouts  
as i sing this song  
to you  
o pomegranite of my  
life sexy chew biscuit  
of my every day  
come to me  
and share  
what little cabbages  
while we may we may



Robert MacDonell Feb 12/1972  
Plate #2

# In The Half Light

1

either way:  
he might have fallen  
before the first cracked  
light of morning  
gazed through the eyelets  
of the curtain  
he, stumbling in the half light  
to the open window  
not being able to quench  
his longing lung  
in the thick aired room  
perhaps in his last dream  
he fell; his body lurched  
away the impact  
leaving him twitching  
and awake.

2

at the window  
his shrouded eyes admit  
no light; he quaffs the air  
and leans out, impending  
on the fulcrum of the sill  
the drop mesmerizes him  
his eyes fuzz, drawing the blank  
of the pavement to him  
its flat gray palm seems closer  
beckoning his momentum

he is alone  
colorless as the dusk  
the sucked air chokes loneliness  
collecting in his throat  
hawking it up in a sob  
he exhales and stares  
watching his grief unravel  
the long way down

and longs to follow  
to rip the sack  
to empty out of life  
the same way he tumbled in  
without speculation

he pitches on the fulcrum  
perhaps yearning to fall away  
or lurching out of his last dream  
and smacks the empty palm

3

the first cracked  
light of morning  
breaks through the shell  
of the sky  
emptying its simmering yolk

the cancelled day;  
its yellow eye broods on  
the window, the drop  
the body broken

on loneliness, a curette  
removing the possibilities  
like a scraped womb



# Remembering To Forget

She closed her eyes. Opened them in degrees, gradually: halfway, three-quarters, all the way open. She did not speak, anything. Both eyes on his mouth, up to his eyes, blaming him already. And then her legs folding neatly, one inside the other, slowly, dropping the knapsack, her books. Extending her buttocks to the floor, she went down deliberate as gravity; she sat on the station floor looking up at him, feet popping up as the rest of her went down.

I don't believe it. I don't believe it.

And shaking her head from one shoulder to the other. Opening her mouth to speak, nothing, then swallowed, clenching her face, exhaling so that the wings of her nose stiffened. Again.

I don't believe it.

He played this picture backwards and forwards, sitting down and then up, like a collapsible double helix, at different speeds, the same words, and her eyes flat and amazed. He had not been prepared for her reaction. Her arms cramped against her sides, she would not move. Everyone leaning up against them, cursing them, skidding on her knapsack buckles, footprinting her books. Remembering every detail, he could compact that scene in the Providence bus terminal into one manageable elastic frame, so that they both became slightly comical. The response to his words had annoyed him, but now the memory gave him an odd sense of delight, a respect for the efficacy of words. How had it happened, she had asked, how was it possible, and he had squeezed his hands down to the point of his pockets, reaching for something to jingle: some keys, some change, looked serious, cocked his head back, sighed and confessed.

Oh my God, you didn't? You didn't really?

And he had. People kept flowing around them, bumping into them, and he thought, this is the way a tree stands in the middle of a river with the water curling by. She would not cooperate. She wrenched her wrist away from his fingers.

How could you do it? How could anyone be so stupid?

And he had mumbled that he didn't see how. Why wouldn't she get up so he could apologize? He had yanked at her sleeve but she retracted her arm and he had pulled the parka over his head, holding the empty sleeve. She stared at him through the headhole, chanting her curses.

Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit, shit, shit. Oh shit.

He had released his grip, walked away. At the door he turned to see her still sitting, following him with her eyes, still her lips moving. He had been halfway up the hill when she caught up to him.

Zeke. Why? Why?

And he didn't know why. He forgot, that's all. Didn't she ever forget? He was thinking about something else and he forgot. But Nina would not accept his answer. It wasn't good enough, she said. And then more questions: about the police, insurance, had he asked the neighbors if they had seen anything? He had. She asked about her camera. He had shaken his head. Her stereo? No. Her typewriter, her radio, her jewelry, oh not her cameo, her grandmother's cameo? And he had recited as well as he could those things missing: everything but papers, a few overdue library books, the linen on the bed, one set of dishes, one chair, all their clothes, the spare bed.

Imagine stealing a bed!

Several stacks of forty-fives, the refrigerator, the stove, all the curtains, his binoculars but not hers, the plants, some canned tuna, the kitchen table, and one rug.

We had discriminating visitors!

Unsmiling she had given him what he called her wilting look and he had shut up. Nina did have a flair for the dramatic. He laughed softly. With his hood up flush against his ears he could listen to himself amplified, in stereo. His voice echoed around his head, a rich, confident baritone.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

In the week since the robbery they had come to realize all they would miss, all they had accumulated over a year. Zeke trudged up the hill singing in the dark, up the hill from the hospital, up the same hill. The first few days he had stayed out of her way and she out of his and she was gone when he got up and asleep when he came home. But this had passed into two days of activity and finally anger as Nina made several necessary trips into strange apartments in the building. She was convinced that a fellow student had been their thief.

Who else would steal a double bed?

And when she could not persuade Zeke to accompany her and after two days without success, she had walked out, briefcase in hand, slamming the door. Offering no explanation, she returned on the third day and he had apologized for his error, tried to explain. He had been thinking of her, he said. Poor old love-sick Zeke forgot to lock the apartment because he missed her, missed her so much he plumb forgot where he was. In the middle of this routine which included other bits from *The Dizzy Dean Story*, Nina told him to shut up. He did, but they ate together that night before he went to work: the first time since the robbery. Now four days after their truce they had borrowed food and linen from friends and shifted to an acceptance of the loss, a presage perhaps not to cherish and collect objects.

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Miiiiiiiiiiiiii.

Zeke decided out loud, because his shoes were already heavy with water, to take the short cut home. He slurped across two backyards, bent down a wire fence, limped across a parking lot, cursing softly. Paul had caught him in the face with an iceball earlier at the hospital. During the chase he had slipped and now his ankle was swollen with a small cut, just enough to make walking painful. He tensed his foot to hold the cut away from the rim of his shoe. He listened to the iambic pace of his sloshing, to the in and out of his



breath. The elevator was warm and so he unzipped, throwing back his hood as the door opened. There was no light from under the door. He twisted the key around, inside both locks, entered turning toward the bedroom. Slipping off his shoes he tracked wet sockprints into the darkness. The even waves of her breathing; Nina was asleep.

The hospital was set into the hill so that if you entered from the top, that is, came down the hill, there were eight stories above ground. If you entered from the bottom, that is, came up the hill, there were ten. Zeke, because he had a key and because the graduate student apartments were further up the hill, entered through the back door. He hung his parka on top of Paul's in the room branching off the storage area which the janitors had claimed as their coffee room. As he entered he greeted the two older men who worked the six to two shift with him and Paul. They mumbled something in Spanish but they smiled and he smiled in reply. The lump of keys jangling from his belt, swinging against his leg with each step, he liked that feeling: the sound, the ability to open doors closed to others, everything about that feeling. With four minutes to kill before he had to check in, Zeke stood slack-kneed, snapping the time card between his thumb and third finger, scanning the Department of Radiology case of the week and reading off the list of surgical tools on display.

Lung clamp—gentle forceps for holding fragile tissues

Septum forceps—for removing nasal septum

Hillyer auricle clasp—grasps appendate when doing open heart surgery

Deaver retractor—holds back tissues, intestines for deep surgery

Rake—retractor to hold back tissue to permit working in deep areas.

Alligator forceps—for removing foreign bodies (chicken bones, safety pins) from the esophagus

Rib cutters—to sever the ribs to permit entering thoracic cavity

He could not understand the reasoning behind such a display. Weren't people scared enough already? Paul rested his head on Zeke's shoulder, laughed, and checked in. He stood at the door, motioning with his head for Zeke to follow. They started up together.

Cops, dumb fuck cops, there are cops in the hospital with guys in handcuffs, leading guys in handcuffs into Transplant.

No shit, I seen 'em.

Transplant was one of the few doors no janitor had keys to, and there were jokes about what really went on in there. Paul claimed they had begun to drag drunks off the streets. It was frightening in a way, you didn't know for sure because the door was locked. They discussed the situation. Zeke said he would keep an eye out. He picked up his broom and began his rounds. They began on the bottom floor, down around the morgue, and he would work up while Paul began at the top, and they would meet somewhere in the middle. They had tried working together but Dr. Marsak had arranged them this way when he caught them on their hands and knees scouring the amphitheater floor for signs of blood. Zeke liked to think of Paul as his corrupter. He knew



more grisly jokes than anyone Zeke had ever met. Jokes about dead babies, abortion, Bangla Desh, Helen Keller jokes. Now whenever he met Dr. Marsak he felt inclined to lower his head. He laughed. After sweeping there was break. Then wash, buff, and wax one and a half floors each night. The two older men had to clean out toilets, empty the trash, and other less desirable chores. He and Paul just kept the floors clean. But at the end of the day they would all rummage through the trash bins together, finding nickels, pennies, quarters, sometimes dollar bills. He and Paul laughed as they did it but the other two were quite serious scavengers. Zeke had to admit he rather enjoyed it. As he swung his broom down one hall after another, stepping aside to let those on crutches, in wheelchairs, to pass, he thought of a joke Paul had confided.

Did you hear about the man run over by the steamroller?

Yes. Where is he? I'd like to see him.

Rooms 12a, 13a, and 14a.

He finished A and B floors. He had seen nothing when he swept by Transplant. A man in a Detroit Tigers baseball cap, his arms around his two daughters, stepped over the mound Zeke had created in the middle of the first floor: cigarette butts, flashes of paper, the thin gray ash that seemed to settle over everything. The man and his daughters watched Zeke until the elevator closed between them. He smiled at the girls and they hid behind their father. Zeke, bringing his broom with him in case Marsak sighted him, strode up the stairs to the eighth floor where, if they worked at corresponding rates, Paul would still be sweeping. They could sneak a cigarette. This job, a night shift, Zeke had decided, required cigarettes, even if he never smoked at home during the day.

Smoking in the dark.

He spoke this aloud as he mounted the flight of stairs. He sang the words in his best Dean Martin throb. The top floors of the hospital were much cooler, but up there, because the building was set at an angle, Zeke felt susceptible to losing his balance. He had a vision of the entire structure keeling over one day and cracking into thick chunks like a broken icicle. The hall was dark, the lights were turned out after dinner, and he could see and hear the heart machines: the regular dark red light and the high squeal of their bleeping. This was the hall Paul always mentioned. If you turned off the electricity, he had whispered, everyone would die. He had even taken Zeke to the circuit breakers one evening and pretended to shut them down. He had placed his hand on the switches but then only made the noise. Alarm.

EEEEEEEEAAAAAANNNNNNNNNNNN.

Zeke was on the sixth-floor landing when, after failing to locate Paul, he heard a small snapping sound, like the faraway crack of a stick.

Zeke. Zeke of the week, you freak.

He heard Paul laughing several floors above him. As he stuck out his head to locate the voice he saw Paul peering down the stairwell, grinning, and then he heard the sound in front of him and saw the round wet spot on the stair. The spit twirled down but as he stepped back it curved in and found his pocket. He raced up in pursuit choosing three and four steps at a time,

but when he stopped he could hear Paul echoing up the stairwell; still three flights ahead of him.

Oooooooooheeeeeeee. Oooooooooheeeeeeee.

He wiped the drool off his pocket with his sleeve. He would catch Paul later with a wet rag across the face or maybe spray his sandwiches with disinfectant. He hadn't yet decided which. Laughter. He trotted down the stairs plotting his revenge.

Oooooooooheeeeeeee.

Zeke leaned back in their only chair, rocking up and back, just nicking the wall, his toes under the two front legs. He watched Nina sleeping. In the year they had lived together they had quarreled two, maybe three times. Once: because Nina insisted they had stopped extending themselves, stopped taking risks in their relationship. She accused him of exploiting her. And she had cut off her hair so that the nape of her neck was bare except for a fuzz. It was just now beginning to grow out, in uneven lengths it streaked across the pillow. She had asked that weekend before she left for New Haven whether she should cut it off again. And he told her no, he liked it long. When he met her at the bus station that night the first thing he had noticed was that her hair was still untouched. The second time, or before that, they had argued about his work.

What are you going to do?

And he didn't know. He thought he would return to school and finish up the last semester. He didn't know. She was disappointed in him, she said. He had no direction, she said. Then he got angry, left for a week, stayed with friends. Three days later she called up to say she was sorry. Nina sorry? He thought, because she needed him to keep the apartment. It was for married graduate students and they had lied, filling out the questionnaire. They had been scared but they had lied anyway. This fight, their third, had begun with his forgetting and eventually it expanded to a criticism of his whole attitude.

Your general irresponsibility.

Zeke stood up, cranked a window open, and slipped his head out. The water cascading down the hill, freezing to puddles of ice. Couldn't she understand that he had simply forgotten? He didn't know what he had been thinking about, he just forgot, that's all. Didn't she, Nina, lose track of things, forget them? Yes she had. Well then why couldn't she understand this? Who didn't forget? The point she said was that you did, and because you did, because you forgot to lock the door on your way out, we were robbed. Certainly, I agree, it *is* human to forget, but I didn't and you did.

Yes Ollie I certainly did.

He smiled his Stan Laurel smile. The water in the gutters, even from eight floors up, sounded full and fast. Chilled through, he ducked his head back in. As Paul had exclaimed when Zeke outlined the situation to him. His best impersonating voice.

But Nina, can't you understand? I'm a dope.

And Zeke had chased him down through the storage area and put him in a headlock, but they were both laughing and Paul kept calling him a dope and



laughing. Zeke was older but Paul was small and quicker. Nina turned over, exposing her bare shoulders and back. She had a worried look when she slept and she did not like him to watch her sleeping which he often did anyway. She felt too vulnerable, she said. On the chair he draped his wet socks, his shoes he tucked under the baseboards. He was cold and grubby. Snatching Nina's towel he padded down the hall, flipped on the light, and zipping off his underwear, he measured the water of the shower with his wrist, waiting for the cold to end and the hot to fade in.

Zeke went down early for break and finding Paul's sandwiches in his coat pocket he ran down into the storage area and dug up a can of white paint and a brush. Finished, he replaced the bags in the pocket and finished his sweeping on the third floor. If nothing else, sweeping gave him time to think. He had decided while sweeping to maybe continue on to graduate school. Nina had been pleased when he told her but her enthusiasm made him reconsider.

Think it over my boy.

Every week Zeke and Paul flipped a coin for the unwanted job of cleaning out the animal lab, the floors, and changing the newspaper in the cages. This week Zeke had lost. Selecting the correct key off his ring, he opened the door trying not to breathe. The room erupted with howls as he switched on the lights. He slipped on two pairs of gloves and began to clean the cages. One mongrel bitch shined and curled her tongue around the bars and around the fingers of his glove. He lifted her out and set her on the counter. She wagged her tail as he folded the wet newspaper and gave her new bedding.

You smell dog.

He could feel her tiny ribs as he hoisted her back inside the cage. She whined and then as he watched she threw up a soft yellow curd on the newspaper. The entire room echoed with yipping, the snickering of the monkeys and the strange howl of the cats. He had been down there once with Paul when there was a cat with an artificial heart who did nothing but lie in her cage and screech. In the corner they had discovered a dog with a needle in its side and a pump was slowly draining off the blood. The dog was standing up, not barking or anything, and he had wanted to pull out the needle but Paul said it was dead already. The lab had a numb smell, formaldehyde and excrement. Zeke changed the paper in the rabbit cage. One of the rabbits had worn all the fur off its nose, rubbing against the netting. He tried to distract a monkey that had electrodes imbedded in its fur but it continued its hunched circling of the cage. He watched it until he was dizzy. He left it alone.

No use hurting yourself.

Paul had been bitten by a monkey earlier in the year much to Zeke's amusement. He breathed as seldom as possible and finishing with the rats, shut off the light, looked back in the darkness toward the mad howling, shut the door. Leaning against the door, frightened and smiling.

Fresh air. We're saved boys.

The two men were seated in chairs at one end, sipping their coffee. They nodded as Zeke came in and plopped himself down in a squashed box full of



industrial rags that Paul had converted into a chair. Reaching for his sandwich Zeke examined it, checking both sides carefully. Satisfied, he closed his eyes and leaned back against that wall with a smaller box as an armrest. Then there was a sudden hollow thud on the box and he was hit. His side jerked, a spot on his ribs stung, he opened his mouth to catch his breath, there was snow in his lap. And then another thud, a round patch of snow was dripping down the box. He looked up to see Paul in the doorway, scooping up snow and packing it together with gloved hands, his mouth and cheeks white with paint. Zeke felt another snowball strike his back as he charged by the two men. Another sailed over his shoulder and splattered in the darkness beyond him. Then nothing. He could not see Paul from the storage area. His shirt stuck to his back. The outlines of the two old men were visible, muttering, shaking their heads. Zeke shouting, laughing.

You will pay for this amigo. You will paaaaay.

As he waited behind a tree Zeke saw the two men leave together, each with a box under his arm. His hands kneading the inside of his pockets, a pile of iceballs at his feet, he stood behind a tree waiting for Paul to appear. He could hear Providence humming down below him. Steam drifted up from a hospital chimney. He wouldn't wait much longer. Maybe he had left through the front. His jacket was still there.

Hurry up peabrain.

That was one of the names that made Paul seriously angry. He had never gone to college and although he was younger than Zeke he had married two months before.

Peabrain. Peabrain. Peabrain.

From the driveway three men were making their way across the back walk, two of them leading a third. They stopped at the door to the freight elevator. One of the men unlocked and opened the door, releasing a rectangle of light on the snow. Were those handcuffs on the third man? Zeke kept his eyes on the door long after the light was gone. He laughed softly to himself. It was perfect, a perfect horror story: Dr. Marsak removing the kidneys, the liver, and the still beating heart from the screaming convict. And then Zeke's thigh winced and gave out from under him. He went down clutching his leg in pain. Another iceball collided with the tree and now he was up scanning the parking lot for Paul. He heard it before he saw it, the dark object whistling, and then he was hit in the face, just below the temple. Zeke discerned the figure across the street under the streetlamp, waving at him.

Oooooooooheeeeeeee.

Zeke charged off the hill, throwing on the run with Paul retreating, zigzagging between parked cars. He took off down the street, the crack of his shoes echoing up the hill behind him. And Zeke followed, pumping his legs straight up and down, determined Paul would not escape this time. And then Zeke fell, skidding across a patina of ice, dragging his ankle along the pavement, shearing a hole in his sock. Paul stopped running and he stood silhouetted against the city below, pouring out white breath, looking up the hill. Zeke down on his side packed one last iceball and scrambling to his feet, heaved it at the figure below him. Paul followed it as arching in the dark it

came down under the streetlamp, shattering in a fan pattern at his feet. They watched each other for a moment, both wet and out of breath. And then Paul turned down the hill. From over his shoulder.

Ooooooheeeee. Ooooooheeeee. Ooohee.

Zeke surrendered himself to the shower. He let the water beat down on his face, slide down his chest, between his legs. His toes were beginning to come alive. He turned around several times, massaging his calf, his shoulders, arching his back. The soap had been whittled down to the size of a nickel and so he squeezed out a handful of shampoo and scrunched the soap down the holes in the drain with his big toe. He smeared the shampoo across his chest, through his hair, washed each arm separately, with care: the wrist with a rotary action along his forearm, and then he squeezed each bicep, pushed the ridge of flesh up and down with the edge of his palm. He was covered, slippery with soap. He held the water in his mouth and then squirted it through his teeth against the curtain, down the wall. He washed hair, dirt, and work away. His body was in tune with the water, humming with the water, hot and fast like the water. He ran the water hard on his cut as the cut from the old one split and was washed away. He strummed on his ribs. His head throbbed and the steam filled the room, sticking to the windows, the mirror, everything. He stepped out of the tub and dried himself. The cooler air in the rest of the apartment hit him between the eyes as he opened the door but he did not faint, he hung on until he felt steady. He thought he heard Nina bounce the bed. He hoped he had not made too much noise. Later in the morning with the toilets flushing and water being turned on and off all over the building it was impossible to sleep.

She was awake, jackknifed against the wall with the pillow doubled behind her.

Hi.

Hi. You woke me up you know.

Oh.

He put one leg into a pair of clean pajamas.

Am I forgiven?

Both legs were in the pajamas. They were cold from the drawer and sent a chill up his chest.

Sure. I guess.

And she handed him his share of the covers, holding them out to form a pocket for his body. He slid down and touched her ankles with his feet. They talked, kissed. She massaged his back and his sore thigh. He told her about the guy with handcuffs going into Transplant. Then with her arm under his neck and his arm between her breasts, gripping her shoulder, they fell asleep, again.







# The Desert Light

—wait. He might have been there  
with his dad  
for several hours:  
they were the first ones. Hands down.

Standing with a light-blue truck  
in front of the drugstore, they  
have taken places,  
their gold eyes turned into the broad light  
ears flattened for the crisp fall of tumblers  
in the nailed lock,  
the rattle-up of the venetian blind,  
or the green door pulling wide  
into dark, vaulted space.

He could be 8:  
his face is a red fist  
in this morning's sun, he is  
already beginning to burn  
His father looks a little  
like him, he hardly moves,  
the heat is terrific —  
he turns his face toward one end of town, he is  
leaning down the desert like a thin flag.

## Coastal Storms

There are hurricanes on the coast tonight,  
they send the ocean tearing at the shore  
like a woman who has nothing left  
but her claws  
until the fury lessens  
and the waves become fists,  
dull and banging all night long.  
The leaves come streaming up the hill towards us.  
They are our only knowledge of distant winds  
as they shove and clatter against our feet  
and the sky is icy cloud blown inland.  
There are hurricanes on the coast tonight  
like the hurricane in you,  
they blow their spent and muted winds to me.  
I know there is something more.

# Meditation

after Baudelaire

Be still my Sorrow, try to behave. You cried  
For evening; look, it is coming down:  
An obscure atmosphere covers the town,  
Bringing peace to some, to others care.

While the vile mass of mortals everywhere,  
Whipped by their need for pleasure, might  
Gather remorse in endless holiday,  
Give me your hand, my Sorrow, come this way,

Far from them. In antique dress, deceased,  
See the years lean on heaven's balcony;  
Smiling regret surfaces from the sea,

The old sun falls asleep under an arch.  
Like a long shroud trailing to the far East,  
Hear, darling, hear the sweet night march.

**REVIEW STAFF:**

Gigi Bradford

Bonnie Bernstein

Liz Egloff

Michael Johnson

Debbie Morris

Janet Podell

Ric Woodward

Katie Woodworth

Leslie Zheutlin

Faculty Advisor: Stephen Minot



